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THE SCANDINAVIAN RECEPTION OF THEODORE DREISER

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In 1889, Knut Hamsun, the Norwegian Nobel Prize winner, published a book which for decades was to color Scandinavia's view of the United States. *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* (The Cultual Life of Modern America) was an immature and "childishly written" (as Hamsun himself confessed later) attack on American fine arts, accusing them of superficiality, crudity, and sentimentalism. American literature was, according to Hamsun, "hopelessly unreal and devoid of talent," and Whitman's "Song of Myself" was "no more a song than is a multiplication table."[1]

Even though later Scandinavian critics of America were more levelheaded than Hamsun, the Norwegian author had set the tone. Far into the 1920's Swedish writers were fond of lashing American smugness and cultural aridity.[2] Dissenting voices to this flagellation seem to have been few. A telling exception was Johannes V. Jensen, the Danish author, whose *Den Ny Verden* (The New World) from 1907 went too far in the opposite direction. Jensen proclaimed that America shortly after the turn of the century had the "most vigorous literature in the civilized world,"[3] and that its foremost representative was Frank Norris, whom Jensen unhesitatingly declared a genius. But Jensen could do little to change the disadvantageous picture Hamsun had already imprinted on people's minds.

The American writers who were translated and became popular were the ones who wrote humor or adventure stories. The period from 1900 to 1920 was dominated by Twain, Cooper and

Jack London, whose books were devoured by young boys and girls. The American realists and naturalists were neglected, with the exception of Norris in Denmark, where Jensen's advocacy yielded fruit so richly that all of Norris's books were translated before 1920. It was not until after 1920, however, that American literature started to be acknowledged, and this was due to writers like Lewis, Dreiser, Wharton, and Sherwood Anderson. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, who should have been the natural instruments in such a change, were not influential until the 30's and 40's.

Theodore Dreiser was accustomed to paving the way, and, together with Sinclair Lewis, this was the role he played in Scandinavia as well. Before 1925 and *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser was virtually unknown; he was occasionally referred to in surveys of modern American literature. After the story of Clyde and Roberta and after Dreiser's trip to Scandinavia in 1926, when he met publishers in Sweden and Denmark, translations started to appear one after the other, which helped convince the obstinate critics of the value of American fiction.

SWEDEN

Sweden was the first of the Scandinavian countries to translate Dreiser. The obvious first choice was *An American Tragedy*, which appeared in 1927. Hamsun had asked for a "doubter" in American literature, and to Swedish critics Lewis and Dreiser seemed to be the answer. They were acclaimed as pioneers "in the heroic struggle to speak a word of truth in the land of hypocrisy and materialism."[4] Lewis and Dreiser were invariably compared to each other. One critic found *An American Tragedy* to be "a whole river" in comparison to the "clear and cheerful little rill" of Lewis's prose. Others missed in Dreiser Lewis's irony and playfulness. Lewis was on the whole considered the better craftsman and seems to have done more than Dreiser to change the attitude towards American literature.

An American Tragedy was well received in all quarters. The evaluation of Professor Fredrik Böök, the grand old man of Swedish criticism at the time, may be considered representative of its reception:

> From a theoretical point of view it is not hard to take exception to *An American Tragedy*, but it is impossible to read it without being moved and shaken, it so full of reality, so convincing, so imaginative in its very

artlessness. It tells about a weakling, but not a trace of sentimentality can be found in the presentation of his life, and willy-nilly we become deeply interested in his fate. And when we have finished the book we have got a gigantic panorama of American life as we have felt it swarming all about us. There is an endless number of facts, each as coarsely chiseled and formless as bricks; but together they build an imposing structure. Theodore Dreiser is no artist of form; his style is gray, colorless, wordy; but he is undeniably a master builder.[5]

Most critics also reacted against Dreiser's predilection for philosophizing. They were not convinced by his physiological determinism, which they found too simplistic because Dreiser disregarded that undeniable force in human affairs called "free will." On the other hand, what appealed to all the critics was Dreiser's sympathy for his fictional characters in their struggle for survival.

Within three years after *An American Tragedy* another four of Dreiser's novels were translated: *Sister Carrie* (1928), *The Financier* (1929), *Jennie Gerhardt* (1930), and *The Titan* (1930). However, none of these were as highly esteemed or sold as well as *An American Tragedy*. Although *The "Genius"* (1936) and *The Bulwark* (1947) were the only books by Dreiser to be translated after 1930, his critical reputation continued to grow, while that of Lewis decreased.

By 1930, the Swedish admiration for American literature had become so deep that the Nobel Prize committee felt compelled to give the award to an American. Long before the committee made the official announcement it was an open secret that the choice was between Lewis and Dreiser, and a series of newspaper articles presented and analyzed the two candidates. The award this year was unusual because it meant deciding between two relatively young non-Europeans in the first year of their candidacies. The general judgment was that Lewis was the more worthy of the prize. When the three members of the Nobel Prize committee came to a decision, it was not unanimous. Two of them were in favor of Lewis, whereas Dr. Anders Österling saw more permanent values in Dreiser, since his books were related only incidentally to timely criticism of America.

DENMARK

In 1930, one of Denmark's foremost critics, Henning Kehler, looked back at the European acceptance of American literature which had taken place since the end of the war. He

tried to find a formula which might explain why certain American writers were successful in Europe while others were not. He drew the conclusion that Europe was not interested in the craft of American fiction but in its message. Those authors who gave the most vivid picture of American society were most likely to succeed. Artists like Hawthorne and James were ignored, while reporters from American life like London and Norris were read and admired. And those who led the way in 1930 were, as in Sweden, Dreiser and Lewis. Stylistically they represented nothing new, according to Kehler; it was the material they presented which was the cause of their success. The Swedish critics preferred Lewis. Their Danish colleagues, on the other hand, seemed to regard Dreiser as the master and Lewis as his disciple. According to Henning Kehler, Dreiser was the more serious, while Lewis had the quicker mind. Dreiser was the prisoner of his own novels. "He drags them along like cannonballs on a chain."[6] On the other hand, Lewis moved merely on the surface of life. Dreiser sounded the deep waters, while Lewis tended to skip the questions he found ticklish.

Publication figures show that although Denmark was slow in acknowledging Dreiser, once he was discovered he became something of a best-seller. Both *An American Tragedy* (1928) and *Sister Carrie* (1929) went through three printings during their first year of publication. *An American Tragedy* was reissued in 1944 and 1960, *Sister Carrie* in 1962. *Jennie Gerhardt* was first translated in 1931 and reprinted as late as 1973. *The Bulwark* was issued twice in 1948. A selection from Howard Fast's edition of Dreiser's best short stories was published in 1954 under the title of *Marriage -- For One*. Dreiser's edition of *The Living Thoughts of Thoreau* also found its way to Denmark and was translated in 1940. Consequently, although *The "Genius"* and the "Trilogy of Desire" never found favor with the Danish publishers, Denmark showed a substantial and lasting interest in Dreiser's fiction.

The reception of *An American Tragedy* was mixed even though most critics agreed that the novel was impressive. The reviewers had problems defining (like all Dreiser scholars) why *An American Tragedy* was a great novel and what Dreiser's power consisted of. They found it so much easier to say what it did not consist of. It was not his style, nor his plot. They were irritated by the length of the novel, and a few of them echoed Mencken by saying that four fifths of it could have been left out without any real harm. Clyde was seen as a flat character -- a symbol and a carrier of ideas which left the critics fairly cold. Why was Dreiser a great writer then?

One reviewer suggested that his greatness might be found in his impartiality; another stated somewhat vaguely that it was to be found between the lines. A third critic said that *An American Tragedy* "seizes the reader by the throat and squeezes it with a power that increases from page to page," and when the reader came to the last page he had "experienced a thrill that terrifies the soul." According to the same critic *An American Tragedy* was a great achievement because it was a Christian book in spite of Dreiser's anti-Christian attitude. The story was so edifying that, shortened, it could be printed in any Sunday school paper.

Although *Sister Carrie* (1929) was considered "genuine," "moving," and "free from crude effects" by some, most reviewers agreed that a doubtful favor had been done to Dreiser in translating the book. Carrie was considered a puppet and Dreiser's philosophical explanations both awkward and long-winded. One critic thought that Carrie's story belonged in a fourth-rate women's weekly; another compared it to a dime novel. A third, also taking the picture of Cowperwood into consideration, found Dreiser's eroticism unconvincing: "He is a methodist, who, as proof of his sincere apostasy, hangs photogravures of Boucher's and Watteau's paintings in his bedroom, but who, in his heart, hangs on to the old pictures of little lambs and white-winged angels he had before his eyes as a child." But all these derogatory views could not eclipse the portrait of Hurstwood, who, according to one critic, "takes his place in the row of unforgettable personages, created by great writers and created from flesh and blood."

Jennie Gerhardt met with the same ambivalent judgments, and after this long course of hesitation on the part of Danish critics, it is surprising to find that they all accepted *The Bulwark* (1948) unreservedly. One critic thought it the most valuable book written in many years; another regarded it as Dreiser's most important novel. Several reviewers agreed that it was a monument over a great author, a lasting monument of classical simplicity. If the Danish critics had felt that Clyde and Carrie were wooden Indians, they were now convinced that Dreiser was capable of giving life to his characters. They were moved by Dreiser's sympathetic picture of Solon's tragedy, which they found to be drawn in warm colors and to be of the highest quality. A Christian daily went slightly too far in its admiration when it pronounced *The Bulwark* the best Christian novel of the year.

NORWAY

The 1901 Heinemann edition of *Sister Carrie* was not the first introduction of Dreiser to European readers. Already three years earlier Dreiser's *Cosmopolitan* article on the Chicago stockyards appeared in a Norwegian magazine,[7] a theft which Dreiser surely was not aware of.

After that the Norwegians forgot about Dreiser until 1932 when *Jennie Gerhardt* was translated. What characterizes the reception of Dreiser in Norway is that his books were translated much later even than in Sweden and Denmark. Maybe Hamsun's influence was stronger in his native country than in the rest of Scandinavia. Maybe many Norwegians read the Danish translations, and there did not seem to be a need for Norwegian ones. *An American Tragedy* was published in 1938 with a second edition in 1951. *The Titan* appeared in 1940 and *Sister Carrie* was not translated until 1953. On top of this fairly tepid interest in Dreiser, his books were not to be had at all during World War II, when the German occupants banned Dreiser's books, no doubt because of his communistic inclinations.

Almost all Norwegian articles on Dreiser around 1930 referred to Hamsun and denounced his view of American cultural life. It seems as if the reviewers wanted to cast off the yoke Hamsun had laid upon them forty years earlier. America was no longer, in fact never was, the superficial and fatuous country that Hamsun thought he saw, and it is clear that the critics considered Dreiser a substantial factor in helping change their view of American literature.

The Norwegian reaction to Dreiser's novels was similar to that of Sweden and Denmark. What appealed to the reviewers was the depiction of the milieu, the debunking of American society. But contrary to their Danish colleagues, they were impressed by the portrait of Carrie, which they thought was drawn with unusual power and intensity. Invariably, however, they made a reservation as to his style. One of them stated that no other writer having domiciliary rights in world literature wrote such wretched prose as Dreiser, but he did belong to world literature even though "he writes like a hog and speaks like a German museum guide."

DREISER'S REPUTATION TODAY

On March 12, 1951, Carl L. Anderson undertook a survey of the holdings in and circulation of American fiction in twenty-one Swedish lending libraries throughout the country. Because of the very active use made of such libraries in Sweden, the results of the survey were a valuable index to public interest in American fiction. To follow up this survey I asked the same lending libraries to supply figures soncerning the holdings in and circulation of only Dreiser's works on March 12, 1974. From the result one should get a fairly good picture of Dreiser's standing today compared to twenty-three years ago. These are the figures Anderson and I received concerning Dreiser:

	In translation		In original	
	No. vols.	On loan	No. vols.	On loan
3/12/51	388	141	82	11
3/12/74	276	48	113	29

In 1951, then, 36 per cent of the translations were on loan, an astonishingly high figure considering the fact that the majority of his books were translated around 1930. Thirteen per cent of Dreiser's works in the original were on loan the same day. From the 1974 figures one easily notices that Dreiser's reputation is going down-hill, even though any author should be satisfied with such a circulation: 17 per cent of the translations on loan, 25 per cent of the originals. The reason for the increase in the circulation of Dreiser's books in English may be that English is more commonly understood today than in 1951 and that Dreiser books have been set as required reading at universities. Only *Sister Carrie* has been on loan regularly for the last decade, and one librarian suggests somewhat facetiously that the reason may be that the Swedish word for "sister" also means "nurse," and that readers borrow it with the expectation that it is a hospital romance.

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In sum, Dreiser, together with Lewis, was instrumental in repairing the damage Hamsun had done to the Scandinavian appreciation of American literature. Lewis got the award for this pioneer work, but it could equally well have been Dreiser, as the member of the 1930 Nobel Prize committee, Dr. Österling,

pointed out in 1947: "When the Nobel Prize of 1930 was awarded Dreiser's younger competitor, Sinclair Lewis, there were many who felt that the older man should have had it. In retrospect it may be said without hesitation that these persons were right."

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[1]Knut Hamsun, *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv*, (Copenhagen: Philipsens, 1889), p. 64.

[2]For information on the Swedish reception of American literature I am indebted to Carl L. Anderson, *The Swedish Acceptance of American Literature* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1957).

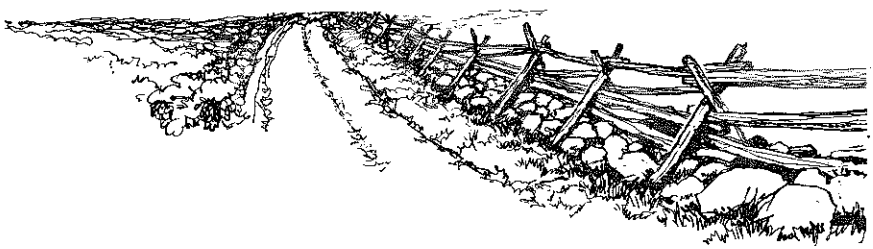
[3]Johannes V. Jensen, *Den Ny Verden* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907), p. 54.

[4]Anderson, p. 74.

[5]Quoted from Anderson, p. 77.

[6]Henning Kehler, "Amerikansk Roman," *Det nye Danmark*, 3 (1930), 163-70, 290-96.

[7]Theodore Dreiser, "Slagterierne i Chicago," *Kringsjaa*, 12 (November 15, 1898), 641-46.



HYDE'S TABBS AND DREISER'S BUTLERS

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Much as it approaches the *roman à clef*, Dreiser's *Financier* does depart from the verifiable record of Charles T. Yerkes, Jr., on which it relies. The chief addition to the factual story concerns the figures of Aileen Butler and her father, Edward Malia Butler. What Dreiser knew of their prototypes, the second Mrs. Yerkes (in her youthful years) and her parent, was confined to newspaper stories, most of them retrospective, printed in the post-1905 era. Aileen's real name was Mary Adelaide Moore, her hair was black, her eyes also, and her headstrong nature was evident even in childhood. Her sizable Irish-Catholic family was headed by Thomas Moore, of whom Dreiser knew only that he was a chemist employed by the drug firm of Powers and Weightman. It was said that the daughter's infatuation with Yerkes, after first meeting him, probably when she was sixteen, had precipitated a familial rift. But Thomas Moore, so far as is known, had no association with Yerkes and was in no position to block the man's advances toward his willful "Mollie."

When *The Financier* appeared in 1912, however, Mollie Moore as Aileen Burler remained essentially faithful to her prototype, while the father stepped into fiction as a fully-drawn portrait of a self-made American whose paternal wrath is instrumental in sending Frank Cowperwood to penitentiary. The invention of Edward Malia Butler and his use in the plot are generally regarded as major accomplishments, cited as prime instances of Dreiser's inventive capacity. And so they are--but not entirely.

Dreiser worked most easily from sources, whether drawn from personal experience or gained through research, and his creation of the Butlers is no exception. Even before *The Financier* was completed, let alone published, Dreiser's urge to boast of his research led him to tell an interviewer that he had read all he could find on his subject, had pored over every volume then available, including "Hyde's book . . .

and the rest."[1] Hyde's book was *The Buccaneers*, a novel which Henry M. Hyde had published in 1904 and subtitled "A Story of the Black Flag in Business."[2] This slim volume, Dreiser thought, did little more than "nibble" at the barrel of cheese which the business theme offered to a novelist. What he failed to publicize was that the novel contained elements he found worthy of appropriating for his own saga.

The Buccaneers is built upon a triad of characters:

(1) Thomas Tabb, president of the Wireless Motor Company, a man who "started with six thousand dollars, a few brass cog-wheels, and a burning ambition to get rich" and who has "devoted the best twenty years of his life to the creation of a great business." (*TB*, 1-2)

(2) Ellen Tabb, his red-haired daughter, an only child and the apple of his eye; "it was something to know that his daughter was of the finest type" and that she would make a marriage that was pleasing to him. "Of course he knew that sometimes girls took such matters into their own hands, pleasing their own sweet wills and disobeying their parents. But not his daughter! He was Thomas Tabb, and his word was law in his family." (*TB*, 6,8)

(3) John Clark, president of the International Electric Appliance Company, "a very tall, straight young man, with a closely clipped brown mustache and a self-contained manner. . . . a man who was used to having his own way. There was an air of authority about him which was at once fascinating and irritating." (*TB*, 36)

To readers of *The Financier* the correspondence of Hyde's personae to Dreiser's is apparent at once. Aileen is given Ellen's red hair as well as a variation upon her name; Edward Butler's rise from slop collector to wealthy contractor parallels the career of Thomas Tabb; while Frank Cowperwood is prefigured in every passage describing John Clark.

The rival corporations engage in a duel over the monopoly on electric motors and their respective presidents become implacable foes. The younger rival is attracted to the older man's daughter, and Ellen Tabb's loyalties are torn. Her devotion to her father is strong, as is her awareness of his "deep stubbornness and deadly pride," traits she herself has inherited. But Clark's magnetism proves overwhelming; "instantly she felt that subtle sense of power which the man carried with him. . . . He knocked over all the conventions and came straight for what he wanted with a strength and a determination which frightened her. At the same time she admired him for these same qualities. It was impossible not to admire such a masterful man." (*TB*, 91, 117)

The anonymous letter from a chance observer of the Aileen-Cowperwood rendezvous which brings Edward Butler his first news of their romance is prefigured in *The Buccaneers* when a gossipy employee by happenstance stumbles upon the Ellen-Clark relationship and whispers to Thomas Tabb that "this man Clark was her escort to a ball and took her driving into the country. Now he has followed her down to Maine. I thought you might be glad to know the situation as a mere matter of business." (*TB*, 155-156) Stunned, then enraged, Tabb writes a letter demanding an end to this affront, threatening Ellen with disinheritance should she persist. Faced with her father's "pitiless anger," but caught by Clark's "irresistible power," Ellen feels trapped between "two relentless millstones," fearful and attracted simultaneously, sensing that the future holds the possibility of estrangement "from all her family, from many of her friends" and warned by her mother that a man "wins tremendous success in business only by making it the one great passion of his life. Almost always his wife is left to live on the crumbs which fall from the table of her successful rival." (*TB*, 160, 164, 220) The stage for realistic drama is set.

But Hyde is no Dreiser and *The Buccaneers* no *Financier*. Hyde's book, lightweight to begin with, dissolves in romance when Ellen, as the final pages approach, breaks the financier's mesmeric spell and flies to the arms of the handsome blond clergyman who had been her constant escort before Clark appeared on the scene. Eschewing such a finale, which would not fit the Yerkes story in any event, Dreiser found Hyde's book useful in suggesting a basic situation--antipathy between a powerful father and a dynamic lover, with the girl in the middle. Integrated with the Yerkes story and given extended three-dimensional treatment, this embellishment did no violence to Dreiser's realistic foundation but enhanced it, providing a stage for one of his finest renditions of the parent-child dilemma, and all in all, provoking a considerably more satisfactory fiction than the bare bones of the Moore-Yerkes stories could possibly suggest.

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[1]Montrose J. Moses, "Theodore Dreiser," New York *Times*, 23 June 1912, p. 378.

[2]Henry M. Hyde, *The Buccaneers* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904).

ON LEXICAL PLAYFIELDS:
FURTHER SPECULATION ON "CHEMISMS"

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In her study, *Two Dreisers*,[1] Ellen Moers discusses in some detail "the most disliked and least understood of Dreiserisms (256)," the word "chemism." She cites the critique of Dreiser's usage by an audience that includes Howe, Trilling, and Vivas. Then, with meticulous care and research, she traces various probable sources for Dreiser's choice of the word, moving from etymology to indirect sources (Kant, Loeb) and finally to the most likely direct source (Brill's translation of Freud). Moers thus presents a fascinating account of the progress of an idea from "the back of Dreiser's mind (257)" to its significant appearance, along with other more obvious Freudian terminology, in *An American Tragedy*.

One other possible source is not included among these probable influences: Karl, Baron von Reichenbach, who is credited with the first use of the word "chemism" by the OED.[2] Baron von Reichenbach conducted a series of unusual experiments in the mid-1840's and beyond, using magnets in darkened rooms, and recording in various ways currents of force between persons and objects. To us, from our 20th century vantage point, his work seems a curious blend of science and spiritualism, perhaps reminiscent of the style of Elmer Gates. Indeed, he seems to have received little support from the scientific community. Reports of his work, however, found their way into the popular press of England and the United States, according to R. L. Moore[3], and exerted an influence. Theories of such seemingly-magical forces as electro-magnetism excited the contemporary imagination as much as ideas about the new biology.

By Moore's account, the essence of von Reichenbach's work was the discovery of an imponderable force that emanated from all objects and was related to, although it differed from, electricity and magnetism. This so-called "Odic force" seemed to have chemical properties (thus, chemism), and provided an

explanation of mesmerism and animal magnetism, phenomena that seemed mysterious bridges between the spiritual and the material.

Although direct connections are not clear, it is tempting to speculate that von Reichenbach indirectly helped to plant the word "chemism" in the back of Dreiser's mind. There is a striking congruence between his theories and the descriptions of quasi-magnetic force by Loeb and Freud which confirmed Dreiser's own observations of the powerful current of interpersonal attraction. Yet the sense of the sleight-of-hand man that permeates von Reichenbach's work may make the use of his terminology additionally suspect, from the point of view of both literary critics and orthodox modern scientists.

Clearly, however, "chemism" was Dreiser's deliberate choice rather than an unfortunate slip. Moore's discussion may offer some further insight. Assessing the impact of 19th century science and technology, he suggests that the new ideas both undermined traditions and "made almost anything seem possible." Dreiser, in his use of the language of science and pseudoscience, reveals that same mixture of heterodoxy and credulity--offering another key to the mind of his age.

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[1]Ellen Moers, *Two Dreisers*, (New York, 1969). See especially pp. 256-63.

[2]*Oxford English Dictionary*, compact edition, Vol. 1., p. 390. The word "chemism" first appears in 1851 in the title "Reichenbach's Physico-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity..and Chemism in their relation to Vital Force."

[3]R. L. Moore, "Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings," *American Quarterly*, 24 (Oct. 1972), pp. 474-500.

REVIEWS

Dreiser's Social Criticism

Theodore Dreiser: His Thought and Social Criticism, by R. N. Mookerjee. Delhi, India: National Publishing House, 1974, xvi + 267 pp., incl. bibliography and index.

This book is still another biography of Theodore Dreiser, this time from India and with much greater concentration than usual on Dreiser's books of social commentary (such volumes as *Dreiser Looks at Russia*, *Tragic America*, and *America is Worth Saving*.) The author has worked carefully with the Dreiser papers at the University of Pennsylvania Library and the Lilly Rare Book Library at Indiana University in Bloomington, and he also presents his readers with an impressive bibliography of twenty-three pages. Besides, his quotations from manuscript material, including letters; from early magazine stories of Dreiser; and from various Dreiser critics and scholars, as well as many commentators on the American scene, argue for a certain thoroughness which is, in many ways, admirable. Yet, despite all this, it does not seem to me that R. N. Mookerjee has added significantly to an understanding of Dreiser and his work. Instead, despite occasional protests and the presentation of what he considers to be a heretical view, he has, I feel, mainly presented us with the official "views" of the "establishment."

In support of my point, I would like first to inquire into the author's understanding of Dreiser's naturalistic determinism. Mookerjee is certainly to be admired for pointing out that Social Darwinism -- which, Dreiser tells us in *A Book About Myself*, "quite blew me, intellectually, to bits" -- is quite inconsistent with the views presented in Dreiser's fiction; and no doubt some passages which speak favorably of "free will" can be excused on the grounds that the author means by "free will" our undebatable "powers of choice." Yet, after making such concessions, it still seems to me that

Mookerjee is subscribing to an "either-or" principle which exists only in the minds of free willists and which shows a basic misunderstanding of deterministic theory:

> A close examination of Dreiser's novels [he writes on pp. 34-5] reveals that though he did, of course, have many features in common with what generally goes by the name of naturalism, he also exhibited in an equally important manner characteristics which could be termed anything but naturalistic. There are to be found in his novels elements distinctly spiritual, moral, and supernatural as well as the exercise of will on the part of his characters. This qualifies his naturalism very much.

Now, though the supernatural (with which I shall deal later) definitely contradicts the theory of naturalistic determinism, the exercise of rational choice on deeply spiritual and moral grounds does not. Mookerjee stops short when he presents Lars Ahnebrink's definition of naturalistic determinism as the theory that "man can be explained in terms of forces, usually heredity and environment, which operate upon him (p. 36)." Though this statement is correct, as far as it goes, it omits the very important fact that heredity and environment (or, more accurately, the play of environment on individual heredity) account only for the production of individual character. What naturalism denies is *not* the exercise of "will" in the sense of rational powers of choice, but the idea that it is possible for anyone, anywhere, to act out of character. Therefore, Clyde Griffiths could plot out murder and have a "change of heart" at the last minute, a clear exercise of a kind of "will." What he could not escape, however, as Dreiser so admirably shows, is the character which allowed "unreason or disorder and mistaken or erroneous counsel. . . to hold against all else (Book II, Chapter 45, *An American Tragedy*)." In other words, though the naturalistic determinist does not agree with any concept of "will" which makes it totally free from all causes, he does not believe, as does Mookerjee, that all causes are of the "pushing" kind which makes for one-to-one relationships (as when my hitting domino-one makes all the dominoes fall).

The matter of the supernatural or of divinity in the generally accepted anthropomorphic sense is, admittedly, more difficult to handle, but it is not, I think, impossible to show that a naturalistic determinist can present his material in supernatural terms. On p. 62 Mookerjee writes:

> In "The Blue Sphere," his first play involving the supernatural, Eddie, a deformed child, is led to his death (he is crushed under the wheels of a passing train) by a beckoning lady called Shadow, a supernatural phantom. The child is thus a victim of an accident predestined by superhuman fate. The implication is that there may exist some superhuman pattern of laws that govern our behaviour over which human beings have little control.

This interpretation of the play is, certainly, a possible one, and it does fit with Mookerjee's "either-or" views as already presented. However, there are other possible interpretations. I am inclined to believe that the play is symbolic, showing how a basic hereditary deformity can shape one's life and lead to early death. As for environment, Mookerjee quotes D. E. S. Maxwell to the effect that "from people reared in violence, dishonesty and squalor of slum life we can expect only violence, dishonesty and dirt (pp. 37-8)." It seems to me that this, too, can be presented in supernatural terms. Let us look for a moment at Dreiser's poem "The Visitor." The poem deals with the appearance of the supernatural at a sceance. Quite early in the poem Dreiser admits that the visitor has "strength" and a "sense of direction," but asks

> . . . how can that be,
> Without body?
> Without form?

In my interpretation, Dreiser here combines body and form in a naturalistic way. Thus the "visitor" must explain himself. Then Dreiser concludes (quite powerfully, in my opinion):

> What are you like, O visitor,
> That here upon my table,
> Chair,
> Thus taps and taps and taps . . .
> Without a trace of gain . . .
> And why to travail so
> With those who do not know? --
> Who cannot know? --
> Who cannot see or hear
> Beyond these taps . . .

Certainly there is reverence here for the mystery and wonder of life, as Mookerjee points out in his discussion of the poems and of Dreiser's book of philosophy, *Hey Rub-A-Dub-Dub*. But to me the fundamental question Dreiser is asking in "The Visitor" is like that he asked in "The Blue Sphere"; if,

in the play, he was struck by how a hereditary defect can shape one's life and lead to ultimate death, in the poem he is concerned with how environmental sources can shape one's life (and, as in *An American Tragedy*, lead to death). Mookerjee, I feel, does not see this because he takes the supernatural literally, not symbolically,and because he is convinced that the moral and the spiritual cannot have a material source.

"Those who do not know" and "cannot know" why heredity and environment shape us as they do and present the mysterious spectacle of life which so intrigued Dreiser can, nevertheless, employ their reason in an attempt to learn more about these naturalistic forces than they knew before. On p. 186 Mookerjee points out Dreiser's experience at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory; on pp. 155-6, he tells us of Dreiser's interest in technocracy; and on pp. 193-4 he shows Dreiser's disappointment at the inability of science to tell us what we "cannot know":

> . . . Theories multiply [wrote Dreiser]
> but an answer to the mystery of life --
> not any.

Dreiser's confusion here is between two basic philosophical questions: "How?" and "Why?" The first science is equipped to answer, and if -- as with current cancer research -- it cannot explain all of the "hows," we can well hope that someday it might. The second question, however, is beyond the ability of science to answer. When Dreiser attempted to learn the "why" from science he was inevitably disappointed: the mystery remained. If I have any quarrel with Mookerjee on this point, it is only that he apparently believes that a philosophical materialist is incapable of such conclusions.

But to move on. I have no desire here to argue for Marxism in a political (as opposed to a philosophical) sense. Yet it is well known that Dreiser did join the Communist Party toward the end of his life, and -- though Mookerjee does acknowledge the philosophical Marxist's book, *Dreiser and the Soviet Union* by Ruth E. Kennell (p. 97, footnote 6), it seems to me that it is non-Marxist Robert H. Elias whom he most closely resembles in his explanation of Dreiser's decision to join the American Communists:

> Dreiser's formal allegiance to Communism [Mookerjee writes on p. 222] was the culmination of his political and social creed which envisaged justice and a fair deal for the masses. It was also a kind of indictment of a society

> in which so many must suffer in order that a few may prosper. At long last believing in a benevolent Creator, whatever different names and forms men may give Him, he found no objection in joining his wife in a Good-Friday church service and staying on for the Communion.

Mookerjee feels that this "Good Friday" decision of Dreiser is quite significant. Yet, if one thinks of living as an art (and every sincere artist, it seems to me, must -- to some degree -- do so), this too becomes a symbolic act showing, *not* a diametrically opposite view from that of Communism, but a dedication to Communistic principles, as Dreiser saw them. Thus the "either-or" attitude again clouds the author's understanding. Further evidence of this attitude may be seen on p. 226:

> Theodore Dreiser was not equipped to be a systematic thinker and his powers were not those of the intellect but of the heart. Unfortunately he did not realize that his real strength lay in his immense capacity for sympathy. For a time, he thought that life was amoral and as such has no place for ethics or morality or justice. But soon he found that much of the suffering that exists in the world really need not be and is the outcome of what man has made of man.

As I have already said, I have no quarrel with Mookerjee's rejection of Social Darwinism and his attempts to show that Dreiser did, fortunately, give up this belief. What I find to be unfortunate in this passage is the implication that "intellect" and "sympathy" cannot be reconciled. Here is the view of Dreiser given by John Cowper Powys in his introduction to *Notes on Life:*

> Dreiser is a thinker, and a thinker, moreover, with a living, growing philosophy of life, that had he lived to be a hundred would have remained incomplete and unfinished. And this is the case because his philosophy was the expression of his ever growing and developing personality.

Mookerjee agrees that the "thinker" and the man of "sympathy" and "heart" are united in one personality, but his devotion to the "either-or" leads him to express it this way:

> Dreiser . . . tried to yoke together discordant realms; the only coherence that one can find in such conflicting

> pursuits [his intellectual "radicalism" and his "philosophy of love and understanding"] is perhaps the unity of personality behind them (p. 225).

Yet emotion and reason, when seen as having the same source and not different ones, are reconcilable (See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949], chapter IV).

I agree with Mookerjee that "within all the conflicting statements which make of Dreiser's philosophy at any given period are to be found all the elements present in his philosophy at any other time," though, as my reader knows by now, I would give a different interpretation to the word "conflicting." Furthermore, I would agree very roughly with Mookerjee's presentation of Dreiser's development from Social Darwinism to love and understanding, but with the elimination of the "either-or" aspect of Mookerjee's biography with which I have already disagreed. When Mookerjee points out that "the only element of his thought which seemed to have changed completely was the idea of the cosmos as chaos [and he] finally rejected it for an ordered cosmos under a benevolent Creator," as he does on p. 225, I add only that this is the rejection of Social Darwinism and that, to the naturalistic Dreiser, the "benevolent Creator" was fundamentally an architect working with material reality. To illustrate this point, I go no further than Mookerjee himself (p. 205):

> . . . God, he reflected, may or may not actually exist but "in the troubled heart of man is this dream of Him." It is, therefore, for us as individuals to "make this dream of a God or what he stands for to us, real in our thoughts and deeds. . . . If you wish a loving and helpful God to exist and to have mercy, be Him. There is no other way."

Mookerjee here refers to a prose poem called "The Hidden God," written fairly late in Dreiser's career and not to be confused with an earlier poem by the same name in which Dreiser rejects the older gods but seeks another--the one found in the later poem. The vicious renunciation of God as a mere "toy-maker" does, as Mookerjee says, tend to fade out in the later Dreiser. But, as I see it, this is simply the rejection of Social Darwinism. Mookerjee uses the above-quoted passage to show that "Dreiser had been gradually coming to regard love and mercy as the only basis of hope for mankind," something which is certainly indisputable, and then goes on to consider *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic*. My only objection to all this is

the constant implication that Dreiser was moving from a call to divinity on the part of human beings to a more ethereal realm. For, if such a realm exists, then -- quite ironically, and much to the defeat of all that is closest to Mookerjee's heart -- Social Darwinism is correct. For a fight between materialists and idealists, lovers of God and lovers of the world, is, after all, a *fight*: it is *not* peace and harmony and love.

Mr. Mookerjee has written a book that gives to all Dreiserians and others much food for thought. This review, I hope, is a reflection of that fact.

--Robert P. Saalbach

A Useful Introduction

Theodore Dreiser by James Lundquist.
Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974.
ix + 150 pp. $6.00.

James Lundquist's *Theodore Dreiser*, an entry in Frederick Ungar's series of Modern Literature Monographs, is aimed at undergraduates and non-specialist readers. Within a tight format (chronology, 126 pages of text, selected bibliography) Lundquist surveys the major outlines of Dreiser's life and work. He draws liberally and effectively upon recent criticism, especially that of Warren and Lehan, and on occasion offers insights that go beyond the requirements of the survey-introduction approach.

In Chapter I ("Dreiser Himself") Lundquist briefly sketches the two Dreisers--the realistic and aggressive temperament that preyed on women and the detached, philosophic, and compassionate Dreiser of the novels. Here the most valuable contribution is Lundquist's seeing Dreiser against the background of Progressivism, citing these points: (1) Dreiser's fascination with the tycoon or robber baron, (2) his dabbling in Leftist-Greenwich Village politics, (3) the air of exposé present in novels like *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, and *An American Tragedy*, and (4) his interest in the liberated woman.

The second chapter ("Dreiser's Women") is in my opinion the weakest of the book. For one thing, it spends too much time on the men in *Sister Carrie*--chiefly Hurstwood--and for another it offers the toothy phrase "subliminal symbolism" (p. 42) as an explanation of the art of *Sister Carrie*. Its discussion of *Jennie Gerhardt* is perfunctory, and its remarks on *A Gallery of Women* are too brief to be called a discussion.

"Dreiser's Men," the third chapter, traces the shift in focus that occurred after *Jennie Gerhardt*, as Dreiser came more and more to put himself into his novels. While *The "Genius"* sought to express Dreiser's self-image, the *Trilogy of Desire* sought to present Dreiser "as he would have liked to be" (p. 63). Yet Frank Cowperwood is condemned finally, and is countered by another hero in Dreiser's fiction, Solon Barnes of *The Bulwark*. Lundquist's pursuit of the doubleness of Dreiser--the amoral materialist and the mystical anti-materialist--is perhaps not always clearly managed in this chapter but is always interesting. Here I should comment on one of Lundquist's most effective rhetorical strategies, his digressive efforts to make Dreiser seem modern. Thus in this chapter he explains that Dreiser, like many American authors, lacked a suitable vocabulary for dramatizing sexual ecstasy. In an earlier chapter he argues that Dreiser's commitment to aesthetic freedom made him a kind of artist hero. Such points will, I believe, prove particularly instructive for the uninformed reader.

The fourth chapter ("Dreiser's Explanation--*An American Tragedy*") contains the best criticism in the study. In another of those useful digressions Lundquist claims that most Americans hold a comic outlook, that is, they believe in solutions and happy endings. Hence a central irony of Dreiser's novel is its depiction of Clyde Griffiths as a character whose tragedy resides in part in his "comic readiness to believe in solutions" (p. 98). This novel is a folk epic, Lundquist believes, and to prove his case he identifies numerous American folktales embedded in the novel's basic Horatio Alger plot: the fast crowd and the rich uncle, the seduced country girl and "the promising youth whose career is destroyed through the consequences of sexual involvement" (p. 92), the poor boy in love with the rich girl, the society boy who kills a poor working girl, the fighting D.A., and so on.

In the fifth chapter ("Dreiser's Philosophy and Politics") Lundquist moves from the first essay in *Hey Rub-A-Dub-Dub!* to an attempt to synthesize Drieser's dialectical view of Nature as a constant balancing principle of checks and balances with

his political commitment to meliorist ideology. Like many previous critics, Lundquist finds Dreiser's thinking a blend of scientific and religious elements.

A brief conclusion emphasizes Dreiser's role as "smasher of illusions" (p. 125) and as a man "forever suspicious of systems" (p. 126). Throughout, there are points that one might legitimately quarrel with--the at times unimaginative use of plot summary, the slighting or omission of some works, the less than compelling style of the author. But on the whole Lundquist has accomplished what he set out to do--to provide for the general audience a useful introduction to a major author.

--D. B. Graham
University of Pennsylvania

LETTERS

The Dreiser Newsletter welcomes critical reaction in the form of letters to the editor and will publish them as space permits.

Tjader on *Notes on Life*

Dear Editors:

We are grateful for Dr. Rolf Lundén's scholarly appraisal of Dreiser's *Notes on Life* in the Fall issue of the *Newsletter*. However, I would like to defend our deliberate omission of an index and further cross references as to where various notes *might have been filed*. In many cases, Dreiser had decided himself where they might best fit in and had crossed off other headings which he had at first jotted down at the top of the page. In the case of other notes, he had placed them in certain folders where he thought they belonged, without crossing off headings not used.

As anyone who wishes to examine these files may see, it is quite impossible to explain Dreiser's methods to the casual reader who has not worked with him. He always produced twice or three times as much material as he finally used--as can be seen also in other manuscripts--and he inserted all sorts of information, clippings, etc., which he often did not use at all. Other materials he summarized or took into account with-

out copying them. This is what made his work so rich and concentrated.

Almost all the longer essays in Dreiser's files were used, except for the few already published. The "problem of dating" we did not try to solve, but left dates which were already noted, as in the case of *My Creator*, one of the last pieces Dreiser wrote and one which he had wished to have printed earlier. But since it was not accepted as a separate statement, it seemed appropriate as a final reflection of his thought.

This leads me to say that I wish Dr. Lundén had loosened up a little and reacted to the beautiful language of some of these notes--and to the sweep of Dreiser's imaginative insights into cosmic mysteries and realities.

There is sometimes a lyric quality here, a symphonic grandeur for those who can feel it. We did not wish to encumber the text with clumsy sub-notes and references. This was supposed to be a *readers' edition*, and I am sure that Dreiser himself wanted people to read his notes with enjoyment and surprise, to ponder them, perhaps, and *chuckle* (as *he* often did) over some paradox or staggering fact.

If this mood of joy is entered into, *My Creator* will be understood as a fitting climax for his later thought, when he was evermore enthralled with the wonders revealed by science and when he was so greatly uplifted by beauty and awe.

But, alas, there seems to be a school of criticism which looks down upon beauty or emotion as sentimentality. This seems particularly true of Dreiser's critics. Dr. Shapiro, in the same Fall issue, almost makes fun of the emotional truth which Larry Hussman was trying to express in his study of Dreiser's power. Dr. Shapiro wants us to consider the words of Dreiser on the page, but not the force which lies behind them or the force between the lines. But perhaps this is typical of intellectual criticism in general and of our day in particular. So be it! Emotions and spiritual values do, however, have a way of surviving in spite of it.

Sincerely,

Marguerite Tjader

Dreiser News & Notes

An American Tragedy is included in a deluxe limited edition of "The 100 Greatest Books of All Time" being put out by the Franklin Library of Franklin Center, Pennsylvania. According to Harold Dies "a very large advance payment has been made so that most likely it will be coming out in the near future," but he adds, "no one can get a copy of the edition except their private membership." . . . . Donald Pizer's *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in late 1975 or early 1976. . . . The December 1974 number of *MELUS*, the newsletter of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, included the following item in a biographical sketch of Robert E. Spiller: "A legend at the University of Pennsylvania is that a young scholar from the proper social background was once so ungentlemanly as to insist that the writing of that gross German-American, Theodore Dreiser, was to be treated as literature. For this radicalism, 'Bob' Spiller was ostracized in academe...and for that same reason, the Dreiser materials are now at Penn.". . . Ruth Narrick sent us the following news item which appeared in the November 1974 issue of *Soviet Life*: "A documentary film on Theodore Dreiser has been shot in Donetsk, one of the 20 cities in the Soviet Union visited by the writer in 1927. ... The movie follows the route of the novelist, showing changes that have taken place in the district since his visit. Reminiscences of Dreiser's contemporaries and sketches illustrating his novels round out the film." ... And, finally, in some recent correspondence with the editors, the renowned author-critic Maxwell Geismar writes: ". . . I don't like the attempt of academe . . . to make Dreiser over into a mystic! Of course he was always a mystic, *based on that good solid materialistic sense of life* [italics added] that he and Twain had in common. . . ." And he adds: "Twain is a superior Dreiser to me, but they are both invaluable."

WORKS IN PROGRESS

David Bryant is writing a dissertation under E. N. Feltskog at the University of Wisconsin-Madison entitled "Love and Success in the Land of the Dollar Bill. Two Popular Literary Conventions in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser"